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CHORES AND DOMESTIC LIFE IN JUVENILE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

CHORES AND DOMESTIC LIFE IN JUVENILE LITERATURE

By

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Throughout the history of juvenile literature, chores and images of domestic life have been ubiquitous motifs. This study explores the use of chores and domestic images in children's and young adult literature, focusing on novels of the early twentieth century. This study examines both the intent behind the heavy use of chores in these books and the potential effects that it has on the readers, with the primary goal of finding the prevalent functions of these images. The method used to evaluate the domestic images in this literature is a close reading of a cross-section of texts, as well as a study of the social norms of the time period. This study found the most important functions embodied in these works to include: reinforcing traditional gender roles, glorifying the ways of the past, making unfamiliar worlds more familiar, and forcing readers to admire and identify with certain characters while ostracizing others. The prevailing and overarching function of the domestic motif is an embrace and glorification of tradition.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandma, Violet Maki, who taught me how to knit and introduced me to *Anne of Green Gables.*

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis follows the format prescribed by the MLA Style Manual and the Department of English.

Throughout the dynamic and ever-growing history of juvenile literature—the constant changes in form and function, the birth of subsets such as Young Adult Literature and "Tweener" literature, the introduction of new content like sex, drugs, and suicide—few aspects of the culture have remained constants. Yet amidst all the constant revolution that characterizes the world of adolescents and adolescent literature, one motif is almost unavoidable. The domestic duties or "chores" of the characters are explored and explained in such excruciating detail, in such a vast majority of juvenile novels, that it bears asking the question: Why do these books—made for young people, who ostensibly hate to do their chores and who shouldn't be interested in reading about other young people doing their chores, continue to feature so many domestic images?

Domestic images, housework, and chores have been motifs in Western literature since Homer wrote about Odysseus's wife, Penelope, weaving a burial shroud for Laertes—and probably even before. Juvenile literature has been around for only the most recent centuries, but it too has had a constant presence of domesticity. In my thesis, I explore the use of chores and domestic images in children's and young adult literature, focusing on the early twentieth century. This time period was fraught with drastic changes in society—especially in family life, the makeup of a household, and the norms and expectations bound up in gender roles. The juvenile literature of the early twentieth century both reflects and resists these changes, and the heavy use of chores in these books

is a dynamic and critical function within this condition. Throughout my research, I examine both the intent behind the heavy use of chores in these books and the potential effects that it has on the readers.

It would be impossible to discuss domesticity without looking to Barbara Welter's essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," which details the value system of the nineteenth century in regard to the separate spheres of men and women. The Cult of True Womanhood, or the Cult of Domesticity, greatly informed the gender norms and expectations of the twentieth century, and constructed a myth of the family life that carried over into modern thought. These ideas are all tightly bound up in juvenile literature, and can be seen to be embodied in the domestic images described therein.

For further research, I look at other theorists and anthropologists of the gender binary, such as Deborah Rotman and her essay, "Separate Spheres? Beyond the Dichotomies of Domesticity." This essay, while suggesting that the lines between the private and public spheres of women and men were not as rigid as some theorists would suggest, provides a unique and clear perspective on exactly how these two spheres met and overlapped, focusing primarily on the female experience.

In order to gain more insight into the male perspective on gender roles and domesticity, I look at theories on the concept of masculinity, such as in Michele Adams and Scott Coltrane's essay, "Boys and Men in Families; The Domestic Production of Gender, Power, and Privilege" and Michael Kaufman's *Cracking the Armour; Power, Pain and the Lives of Men*. These works help to fill in the gaps in regard to the masculine side of domesticity, which is a crucial aspect to this research since housework is far from being an entirely feminine domain.

For primary texts, I look at many prominent children's and young adult novels of the early twentieth century, including Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series, C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia,* J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit,* Gertrude Chandler Warner's *The Boxcar Children* series, the 1937 Disney film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and many more.

For the purpose of my essays, I focused on Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside*, Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. My goal was to get as broad a cross-section as possible, in terms of gender, age, and genre, while still limiting myself within the early twentieth century. *Rilla of Ingleside* provides an excellent study of young womanhood in a realistic piece of fiction. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* offers an image of a family unit, made up of both girls and boys, and how they experience chores within a fantastical world. *The Hobbit* also functions within a magical realm, but approaches domesticity through the eyes of a full-grown male character.

My primary goal through the exploration of these novels is to find the prevalent functions of the chores and domestic images found therein. The most important functions that I find embodied in these works include, but are not limited to: reinforcing traditional gender roles, glorifying the ways of the past, making unfamiliar worlds more familiar (as is the case within the fantasy novels), and forcing readers to admire and identify with certain characters while ostracizing others. With each staging of domesticity, I examine not only the possible intentions of the author, but also the implications that they make

about the characters, as well as the significance and consequence that they hold with the readers.

Chapter One: A Housewifely, Cookly Creature;

Triumph of Traditional Gender Roles in *Rilla of Ingleside*

Over the course of eight novels, L.M. Montgomery creates and shapes Anne Shirley (perhaps better known as Anne of Green Gables) as a girl who toes the line of expected female behavior. She is at times merely accidentally fumbling with—at times absolutely bucking against—the role of the feminine in her provincial Canadian town in the late nineteenth century. While Anne performs the tasks a young girl should—cooking, cleaning, going to Sunday School, minding her elders—with benevolent but mixed results, she also likes to read more than a young girl should, asks more questions than she ought, loses her temper, and competes with the boys in the academic arena. As she matures, she also pursues a literary career, gets a job as a teacher, goes to college (and not just to get a husband), rejects five marriage proposals, and continues to be a fiery, passionate, temperamental personality.

Anne's behavior has won her not only a special corner in many young girls' hearts, but also a place in many feminist readings of the novels, not to mention a certain celebrity on countless feminist blogs. This is not to say that Anne Shirley was created to fulfill feminist ideals. These books were created for the pleasure of children, and are not overtly concerned with being part of the feminist agenda—indeed according to her biography *Kindred Spirit*, by Catherine Andronik, "L.M. Montgomery never considered herself a feminist. She had very traditional attitudes. She told an interviewer that a woman's place was in the home" (88). But it is significant that these novels emerged and rose in popularity during the Canadian women's suffrage movement and shortly before

women got the vote in Canada and abroad. And by all accounts, Anne is certainly a strong, independent and positive role model for the young girls who read about her.

Therefore it is with curiosity that we must be introduced to her daughter, Rilla. After seven novels accounting the life of Anne, and of her six living children in general, the eighth and final novel of the series, *Rilla of Ingleside*, focuses primarily on her youngest daughter. Where Anne was an enthusiastic housekeeper and scholar, Rilla has no ambition beyond having fun. Her brothers and sisters all have high hopes for their futures and careers, but Rilla is more interested in dancing with Ken Ford and her pretty shoes and dresses. Then, with the coming of the Great War, Rilla is forced to learn how to cook, knit socks, and raise a baby. However, she never comes to have higher ambitions than being a wife and mother. She ends the novel with all the skills that Anne Shirley had by the beginning of *Anne of Green Gables.* Rilla's growth in housekeeping brings us around full circle, ending the series with the reassertion and triumph of a more traditional feminine role.

The traditional feminine role to which I refer has carried over from centuries of cultures that believed the woman's place was in the home. As Deborah Rotman explains in her essay, "Separate Spheres? Beyond the Dichotomies of Domesticity,"

> Indeed, the model of "women at home" has shaped the social relations of many peoples across time and space. However, under the cult of domesticity, the separation of gender roles was often inextricably linked with the separation of public and private spheres. (666)

Rotman goes on to say, "the home was defined as a private, female sphere in opposition to the public economic sphere of men (666). The nineteenth century, in which

Montgomery was born and raised, *Anne of Green Gables* was set, and which therefore heavily informed the values of the rest of the series, saw the birth of the Cult of Domesticity or the Cult of True Womanhood. This value system reinforced the gender binary, specifically in regards to the separate spheres of men and women. According to Barbara Welter's essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," a woman's proper sphere was her home, and a wife should therefore be concerned with domestic affairs alone. A woman was seen as vulnerable, passive, and submissive, and, as Welter says, "The best refuge for such a delicate creature was the warmth and safety of her home" (162). Whether she was fulfilling the role of daughter, sister, wife, or mother, a woman should always find her accomplishment and identity in home-life. In Montgomery's novel, Rilla Blythe carries out and embodies these values exactly.

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Rilla's growth as a character can only be possible if she begins at the lowest common denominator. She is nearly fifteen, and as Anne points out, "She has no serious ideals at all—her sole aspiration seems to be to have a good time" (7). This statement comes during a conversation in which it is revealed that all the rest of Anne's children have made something of themselves in the academic arena. Jem has completed his first year in medicine, Walter, Nan, and Di have been teaching but plan to go to Redmond College, and Shirley is going to Queen's Academy to get his teaching license. Rilla has no such plans. Her lack of ambition isn't entirely her fault, however. As she is Anne's youngest child, there is no hurry to get her out of the house. Also as youngest, she has "been much petted and was a wee bit spoiled" (12). And her lack of household skills can

be attributed to the fact that Anne and Gilbert, with their relatively comfortable lifestyle, have since the birth of their first child kept a live-in maid, Susan, who does all of the cooking and cleaning.

No, Rilla's circumstances as a romantic damsel with nothing to do but be beautiful and young are not solely of her own making. She simply hasn't been expected to do anything more with herself. As she explains it, "Nobody expects me to do anything. And I can't be a housewifely, cookly creature either. I hate sewing and dusting, and when Susan couldn't teach me to make biscuits nobody could. Father says I toil not neither do I spin. Therefore, I must be a lily of the field" (16). She cites three reasons in this speech explaining her inactivity—her own dislike of certain chores, her incapability of others, and the low expectations of her family and friends.

This dynamic was not at all uncommon in Montgomery's lifetime. Her biography describes the author as being unsure what to do with her life, citing that there wasn't much by way of expectations for a young girl's ambition:

> In the late 1800s, there was little pressure for girls to finish high school, and even less to go on to college, unless they wanted to be teachers. Girls generally did not get an education just for the sake of getting an education. Often they married very young, as young as sixteen, and spent the rest of their lives managing the household and raising a family. (Andronik, 41)

While Montgomery proved with her own life that there was more to life than managing a household and raising a family, and while her character Anne Shirley did much to struggle against these traditional (lack of) expectations, Rilla's life in many ways reflects the norms of the time period in which Montgomery grew up.

While Rilla is quite plainly *not* a creature of housework, it is interesting to note that there are no images of other ladies in the house doing work before the war breaks out. There is one exception, and it may be seen only to emphasize Rilla's idle feminine role at the outset of the story. It is the evening of the dance—the dance at which Britain's declaration of war is announced—and Rilla "whirled into the shadowy kitchen at Ingleside, where Susan was prosaically darning socks, and lighted it up with her beauty (21). The juxtaposition between Rilla's "lily of the field" beauty and Susan's prosaic housework show just how separate the two are.

Rilla is roused to action with the start of the war, hemming sheets and starting up a Junior Red Cross at the encouragement of her mother. Rilla speaks to Anne with ambition for the first time, saying "Mother, I want to do something. I'm only a girl—I can't do anything to win the war—but I must do something to help at home" (52). Rilla sees both the limitations of her own sex and the possibilities that it offers. She can't win the war, because she isn't a man, but helping out in the domestic sphere is entirely within her gender expectations. And so she learns to knit and sew, but her true calling comes when she becomes the caretaker of an infant whose only family is a father away in the war. Rilla has no choice but to take the sickly baby in, lest it die. It is no easy decision, as Rilla admits that she is no lover of children.

And here is the ultimate shortcoming in Rilla's character which must be overcome—she has no maternal instinct. She confesses to her diary, "I don't really care much for children. I don't like babies one bit—though when I say so people look at me as if I had said something perfectly shocking… Mother and Nan and Di all adore babies and seem to think I'm unnatural because I don't" (45). She appears to be missing something

in the very makeup of her female humanity—every other woman in her family loves babies, but she is missing this natural instinct. However, overnight Rilla is forcibly transformed into a mother—or at least a mothering figure. Her father, rather than risk overtaxing Anne or Susan, tells Rilla that she must take care of the infant with limited help from others, saying, "If you want to keep that baby here you must attend to it yourself… Younger girls than you have had to look after babies" (65). He ends his statement—equal parts caution and challenge—with a reminder that this is the traditional role of girls, and that if other girls are capable of this, then Rilla should be up to the challenge. There is an assumption here that there is a natural capability in girls for this sort of work. To take care of babies, to cook and clean, should come easily enough to a girl, because that is what she is made for.

While Rilla thinks it absurd to imagine her, of all people, taking care of a baby, she rises to the challenge. After only a few days of transition, she has miraculously tackled the task of motherhood. She does it not out of love of the job or love of the baby—at least not at first. Rather she does it as proof to her peers of her capability as a woman. She says to her war baby, later named Jims:

> No, I don't like you and I never will but for all that I'm going to make a decent, upstanding infant of you. You are going to get as fat as a self-respecting child should be, for one thing. I am not going to have people saying "what a puny little thing that baby of Rilla Blythe's is," as old Mrs. Drew said at the senior Red Cross yesterday. If I can't love you I mean to be proud of you. (75)

She sees this baby as proof of her worth. Her capability is validated not only through his survival but through his chubbiness. If she is to assume the trappings of a mother, Jims must assume the trappings of a healthy baby.

And she succeeds. Women in the village start to tell her how cute and fat Jims is getting. Her father, ostensibly the most important judge of her worth, says to the Ingleside women, "I'm proud of my women folk. Even Rilla here, my 'lily of the field,' is running a Red Cross Society full blast and saving a little life for Canada. That's a good piece of work" (77). He reaffirms not only that she is doing good, womanly work, but also that this work is her duty to Canada. Women couldn't fight in the war, but as Susan puts it, "Those blessed boys have gone to war; and we women, Mrs. Dr. dear, must tarry by the stuff and keep a stiff upper lip" (58). The duty of women is to take care of the home, buck up the boys and, in Rilla's case, take care of war-babies.

Thus Rilla's existence is dramatically changed by her new domestic duties. While her life had previously consisted of daydreaming, writing in her journal, and having fun, she has other things to worry about now. While before she could take her time to mull things over, we see that she doesn't even allow herself time to savor a letter from her beloved brother Walter:

> Well—Rilla scrambled to her feet—time was up. Jims would soon be awake—his lunch had to be prepared—his little slips had to be ironed—there was a committee meeting of the Junior Reds that night—there was her new knitting-bag to finish—it would be the handsomest bag in the Junior Society—handsomer even that Irene Howard's—she must get home and get to work. She was busy these days from morning till night. (82)

While she had previously concerned herself with the length of her dress and her silk slippers, now her pride comes from her newly-made knitting-bag. The focus of her life has shifted from her own physical beauty to the beauty of objects which she can create. She is no longer simply an object of beauty, but a creator and a worker, and that is where her pride comes from. Rilla has become a pragmatic, gloriously busy young woman, and quite a master of her domestic sphere and duties.

The climax of her transformation comes when Jims finally laughs. While he has been progressing as any healthy baby, matching the weight and milestones as stipulated by the child-rearing book that Rilla holds as gospel, he still hasn't laughed, to her worry and dismay. When he finally does laugh, she is overcome with maternal pride, as "Something delightful and yearning and brooding seemed to have taken possession of her. She had never felt like this before… She realized that—at last—she loved her war-baby" (94). Rilla doesn't simply assume the outward trappings of a mother; she is a mother to her very core. She goes beyond caring for this baby, sustaining its life and assisting its growth; she loves it too.

Here, Rilla has become the ideal of womanhood and femininity. As Welter describes in her account of the Cult of True Womanhood, women's magazines of the 19th century praised the home-life of young women, saying, "The true dignity and beauty of the female character seem to consist in a right understanding and faithful and cheerful performance of social and family duties" (162). Rilla, as a representative of every young woman, is never better than when she is fulfilling her domestic duties—she becomes ennobled and admirable.

Now, in case we had any doubt that Rilla has become everything that is admirable and good about the feminine character, Montgomery puts Rilla's new identity to the ultimate test. She has earned the approval of her family and her friends. Now her feminine role must be affirmed by her beaux, Ken Ford. Before Ken goes off to war, he stops by the Blythe house for one final visit, and Rilla and her war baby are the only ones home. After trying and failing to get Jims to fall asleep so she can be alone with Ken, Rilla takes Jims out on the veranda, humiliated by the "ridiculous" image of herself cuddling a war-baby when she is supposed to be courting. However, the image has quite a unique effect on Ken:

> Kenneth sat very still and silent, looking at Rilla—the delicate, girlish silhouette of her, her long lashes, her dented lip, her adorable chin. In the dim moonlight, as she sat with her head bent a little over Jims, the lamplight glinting on her pearls until they glistened like a slender nimbus, he thought she looked exactly like the Madonna that hung over his mother's desk at home. He carried that picture of her in his heart to the horror of the battlefields of France. He had had a strong fancy for Rilla Blythe ever since the night of the Four Winds dance; but it was when he saw her there, with little Jims in her arms, that he loved her and realized it. (133-134)

Here, Rilla has become the fulfillment of male fantasy. She is entirely the nurturing queen of her domestic sphere. She has indeed become divine even, with the double string of pearls in her hair creating a nimbus. She is compared to the Madonna, perhaps the ultimate mother-figure in the history of western civilization. And the

comparison is not without sound footing—after all, Rilla is essentially a virgin mother, just as Mary was. Her girlish silhouette reminds us of that virginity. Her connection to motherhood in Ken's mind is even further stressed by the location of the Madonna—above his mother's desk, heavily associated with his mother's domain.

All of this imagery, this affirmation of Rilla's place in the feminine domain, is what Ken takes with him to the battlefield—where he enters an entirely masculine domain. And most important of all, this is what makes him love her. This is the reward for young girls who take up their role as hard-working, mothering, domestic women. Because it is not her beauty that makes Ken love Rilla—he has seen it many times before. Nor is it her beautiful clothes, or her happy, pleasant personality. It is Rilla's new identity as mother that makes her worthy of male love.

After this, Rilla needs only to complete one final test of her domestic and womanly capabilities; she learns to cook. Whether this new facet of her knowledge is a direct consequence of her engagement to Kenneth Ford (and thus her impending dominion over a household of her own) or simply another lesson to be learned in her domestic education, it is unclear. She gives another reason, saying,

> I am learning to cook. Susan is teaching me. I tried to learn long ago… I never seemed to succeed with anything and I got discouraged. But since the boys have gone away I wanted to be able to make cake and things for them myself and so I started in again and this time I'm getting on surprisingly well. (149)

By Rilla's account, she is learning to cook so she can send cakes to her brothers and Ken at the warfront. Indeed the war is the apparent catalyst for each of Rilla's

revolutions from useless girl to capable woman. And it is possible that Montgomery simply used this metamorphosis as a way to talk about the war. But it is perhaps more likely that Montgomery used this war as a way to bring about the metamorphosis. In any case, this final lesson marks the culmination of Rilla's progress, and she can now be seen not only knitting and caring for her war-baby, but also cooking and compounding candy to send to the fields of France.

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The question may arise: is this story arc truly a part of some master plan of Montgomery's to champion a woman's domestic duties, or is it simply necessitous of telling a woman's story during the First World War? Surely there were many women who, with little prior experience, were made to learn how to knit, cook, and meet many other challenges that they had never thought to meet. Couldn't we say that Montgomery simply had to pick from what was available as story fodder? Absolutely, but it is important to remember that *this* is the story and the character that Montgomery chose to write. She could have chosen instead to follow either of Anne's other daughters, Nan and Di. She could have chosen to follow the story of Faith Meredith, their childhood friend and neighbor. And their stories are indeed wrapped up in Rilla's—we see glimpses of how they experience the war throughout the novel. More to the point, we see glimpses of how they experience the sphere of womanhood.

Nan and Di are more of the "Anne" type of character than Rilla. They are both clever girls, and pursue their college education after some time spent teaching. When the war starts, they join the Red Cross with their mother, and are often mentioned to be

working hard for the war effort. They go to the training camp in Kingsport to continue their Red Cross involvement. It isn't mentioned exactly how much housework they are capable of—they are never seen cooking. But they are seen sewing with little fanfare, so it is assumed they at least have a basic knowledge of needlework. As previously mentioned, they express the "natural" adoration of babies which Rilla lacks.

Overall, Nan and Di appear to have the necessary aptitudes for the domestic sphere—they can accomplish chores when they need to—but they long for something more than just a life of housework. They want an education, and they want to be as involved in the war effort—and not just the home effort—as possible. Di even wishes to be a V.A.D. (Voluntary Aide Detachment) overseas, but is asked to stay home for her mother's sake. Anne, the hub of the Ingleside household, and almost speaking as a personification of that domestic sphere, says of Rilla and her other daughters, "[Rilla] has changed into a capable, womanly girl and she is such a comfort to me. Nan and Di have grown a little away from me—they have been so little at home—but Rilla has grown closer and closer to me" (258). The same war that has brought Rilla closer to her mother (and her home, and her traditional gender role) has pushed Nan and Di farther away.

The path Faith Meredith follows is perhaps a replica of Nan and Di's, but carried out to its logical extreme. She has also pursued a college education, and has completed it at the start of the novel. She joins the Red Cross effort, and she even becomes a V.A.D. overseas at the war front. And when her fiancé, Jem Blythe is injured and sent home from the war, she stays at her post until the end of the war. While her initial purpose for going so far out of the domestic sphere might simply have been to be closer to the man she loves, she remains even after that romantic purpose is no longer a reality. Rilla supposes

that Faith will teach when she gets back, at least until Jem finishes medical school and the two can be married. While these accomplishments and activities aren't exactly aberrant or taboo behavior for a woman, they are definitely outside of the domestic sphere.

Montgomery could have chosen any of these young women to follow in her wartime narrative. There were doubtless many models in reality that these figures were based on—it wouldn't have been unrealistic to focus the story on a woman like Nan, who went to college, joined the Red Cross and had a sweetie go to war. Nor would it have been unrealistic to focus the story on a woman like Faith, who went overseas to be a V.A.D. at the warfront. But these are not the story that Montgomery chose to write—she chose a story of domesticity and home life.

Yet even here we see that Montgomery may have taken another path. She could have chosen to follow Anne herself or the maid Susan. Both of these women are heavily involved in the housework that goes on at Ingleside—they both experience this feminine realm in wartime. However, they experience it in a radically different way than Rilla does, and again this marks a choice on the part of the author in creating the tone and message for this novel.

Anne might have been a logical choice for the main character of this novel. After all, she is Montgomery's most beloved character, and we have followed her growth from a young, dreamy orphan into a woman, wife, and mother. And Anne does her fair share of housework. While Susan is the maid of Ingleside, it is important to remember that Anne knows how to cook and clean, sew and knit, and used to be the sole housekeeper of her home before she started having children. And even now, when an extra hand is

needed in the kitchen, Anne is the one to do it. So why, when setting out to write a story of a woman's domestic life during the Great War, didn't Montgomery chose to write about Anne?

Anne's experience of housework through the novel is colored with grief and escapism. From the moment the war is announced, Anne throws herself into organizing and running the Glen St. Mary Red Cross. She cooks, and knits socks for the soldiers, and cleans house with Susan, but as the war progresses and Anne is repeatedly hit with the grief of it, it becomes increasingly clear that she is using her work as a means of escape. She buries herself in her housework so that she doesn't have to think about the ugliness of war. When, worried about her health, Gilbert tries to stop her from working so hard, Anne entreats:

> Oh, let me work—let me work, Gilbert… While I'm working I don't think so much. If I'm idle I imagine everything—rest is only torture for me. My two boys are on the frightful Somme front—and Shirley pores day and night over aviation literature and says nothing. But I see the purpose growing in his eyes. No, I cannot rest—don't ask it of me, Gilbert. (186)

As her oldest son goes off to war followed eventually by the other two, as the household follows the terrifying news that comes from the front, as she watches the women in her life lose the men they love, and as she loses her own son, Anne finds solace in her housework.

Susan finds an emotional solace in her housework as well, but rather than burying herself in it as a means of escape, she uses it for catharsis. Any frustration, anger, or pent up aggression that Susan experiences throughout the war she takes out on her cooking,

cleaning, gardening, and knitting. While before the war Susan is described as "prosaically" going about her housework, she is now described as doing so "fiercely" (60). Perhaps the member of the household most devoted to following the news, military tactics, and diplomatic intrigue, Susan explains to Anne how she deals with her impatience, saying, "I must take up my knitting then and knit hard till the papers come, Mrs. Dr. dear. Then when I see the headlines, be they good or be they bad, I calm down and am able to go about my business again" (80).

Susan is the most robustly active, and perhaps the most masculine, of the Ingleside household, and would probably be glad to go away to war if her gender role allowed it. But as she is a woman and thus incapable of taking part in the violence, she embodies and visualizes the violence in her housework, explaining: "Well, it is half an hour yet before prayer-meeting time, so I am going around to the kitchen garden to have a little evening hate with the weeds. But all the time I am strafing them I will be thinking about this new worry in the Trentino" (172). She even puts her tasks into military terms, "strafing" the weeds as a military aircraft would attack ground targets. So linked are Susan's aggression and chores that when she feels anger towards the United States' non-intervention in the war, she expresses it by "sticking her knitting-needle viciously through President Wilson's name in the newspaper column" (203). The tools of her housework have literally also become the tools of her aggression.

Rilla, however, is neither the grieving mother burying herself in her chores, nor is she the frustrated maid taking out her aggression in her domestic tasks. Rilla is rather the brave girl, setting forth in this new world of domesticity with a patience and resolve that is to be admired. She does these things because she has to do them, because the war is

forcing her to learn them, but she does them without complaint or distaste—she even learns to like her new role. When bad news of the war reaches Ingleside, Rilla doesn't use her housework to hide from it, nor does she use her housework to fight against it—Rilla's housework becomes a tool with which she can process these tragedies.

In Welter's essay, she describes how women's magazines of the nineteenth century glorified the benefits of domesticity, saying "There is composure at home; there is something sedative in the duties which home involves. It affords security not only from the world, but from delusions and errors of every kind" (162). Rilla has become a brave, calm young woman because this is the type of security from both external and internal turmoil that housework allows. She doesn't have time to despair anymore, because she has more pragmatic things to worry about. She can still allow herself to feel sadness, but she can no longer entirely give in to it. When Ingleside is paralyzed by increasingly bad news, Rilla, "after relieving her feelings by a stormy fit of tears in Rainbow Valley and an outburst in her diary, remembered that she had elected to be brave and heroic" (60). Her emotional and immature reactions become shorter and shorter as her domestic life becomes increasingly more important, until the point where we see only a moment of reaction. When listening to the war report in the Ingleside house, Rilla "laid down her knitting for a moment and said, 'Oh, how can we bear it so long?'—then picked up her sock and went on. The Rilla of two months before would have rushed off to Rainbow Valley and cried (75). Rilla has become our brave heroine, stoically doing what she must for the better good.

This is why it is Rilla's story that takes the center stage. Hers is the most admirable picture of domesticity. She has no selfish rewards in mind that she hopes to get

from her housework. She doesn't try to escape through her chores, she doesn't try to channel anger through them—she does them solely for the sake of doing them, because it necessary. And this is the model that young girls are supposed to look to. If you don't like your housework, do it anyways; be brave like Rilla. Be that stoic, patient, admirable young girl. And the outcome will be that you grow into a more mature, more responsible person, who is better suited for life, and let us not forget, who is more desirable as a wife.

iii

Rilla of Ingleside shows Rilla's journey to finding her identity as a woman. Her gender identity is never entirely in question—she is a romantic, feminine heroine from the start—it is just a matter of her being brave enough to embody a better version of womanhood. Her journey throughout the book runs parallel to another person's gender identity crisis. Walter Blythe, Anne and Gilbert's second son, also has difficulty fulfilling his gender role. In many ways, Rilla's journey is modeled after Walter's, and her braveness and ultimate triumph as a feminine character is inspired by Walter's triumph as a masculine character.

Walter is first mentioned in this novel as being weak from typhoid fever. He has been teaching for two years, and hopes to go to college in the fall, but the question is immediately put forth by a family friend: "Is Walter quite strong enough for Redmond yet?" (6). This question of Walter's strength and potency, though an easily overlooked moment in a flurry of small town gossip, is one that colors his identity for the rest of the novel. When first we see him, he is idling on the lawn with Rilla and the Blythe family's boarder, Gertrude Oliver. He is described as being "stretched at full length on the grass,

lost in a romance of chivalry wherein old heroes and beauties of dead and gone centuries lived vividly again for him" (11-12). This is the identity that Walter maintains for a majority of the novel; he is the sensitive one, the poetic one, the least aggressively masculine of Anne's sons. He is known for his "passionate love of beauty and his equally passionate hatred of ugliness" (13). And when the threats of war start to stir, and Jem and the other boys are jubilant with excitement and nationalism, Walter is filled with dread and sadness instead. His only comfort is that the typhoid fever will prevent anyone from expecting him to go to war.

When Britain declares war, Jem can hardly contain his eagerness to join up. He enlists at the first opportunity, along with many other eager young men. It is quite clear that Jem is meant to be the standard of manhood to which Walter is measured. He is the proud, patriotic, energetic young man that brings throngs of townsfolk to the train station to see him off. He brings his family honor in his voluntary enlistment in the war effort. Walter, however, sinks into a deep depression, wracked with guilt and shame over not wanting to go to war. He confides to Rilla, saying that he envies Jem. She panics, asking if he wants to go to war and is jealous because he can't. Walter responds,

> … no, I *don't* want to go. That's just the trouble. Rilla, I'm *afraid* to go. I'm a coward… I ought to go—I ought to *want* to go—but I don't—I hate the thought of it—and I'm ashamed—ashamed... Everybody thinks I'm not strong yet—and I'm skulking behind that belief. I—I should have been a girl… (46)

Walter sees his gender role as being very clear—he should be unafraid to go to war, or at least go to war despite being afraid. He takes his own fear as being a sign of

effeminacy, and he is beaten down by this concept. It is almost immediately after this conversation between Rilla and Walter that Rilla decides she wants to be heroic and asks her mother what she should do to help the war effort.

Walter's idea of his own shame is only confirmed by society. While at college, he is made miserable by the judgment of people who believe he should be enlisted. Someone sends him a white feather in an envelope, and he writes to Rilla, "I deserved it, Rilla. I felt that I ought to put it on and wear it—proclaiming myself to all Redmond the coward I know I am. The boys of my year are going—*going*. Every day two or three of them join up" (81). Walter's notions of what it means to be a man—a man in time of war—are clearly in sync with society's beliefs. His gender role stipulates that he needs to behave in a certain way, and he is miserable when he is unable to make himself behave accordingly.

Rilla reveals in her journal that there is a rumor circulating about Walter. She is at a meeting of the Junior Reds, and "Then Irene told me the meanest, most contemptible thing that someone had said about Walter. I won't write it down—I can't" (87). It is never revealed what this rumor is. It's possible that the rumor merely has to do with Walter being a coward. But by the extremity of Rilla's reaction to hearing it, it's possible that it deals with homosexuality. Whether or not Walter is homosexual is never made clear in the novel—and whatever the rumor concerns can only be surmised. But it is clear that Walter's inability to conform to his gender role is a matter of intense personal anguish and public shame.

Walter finally breaks down and enlists. He explains to Rilla his reasons for doing so, saying,

> I'm going for my own sake—to save my soul alive. It will shrink to something small and mean and lifeless if I don't go. That would be worse than blindness or mutilation or any of the things I've feared… Rilla, tonight for the first time since Jem left I've got back my self-respect. I could write poetry… I've never been able to write a line since last August. Tonight I'm full of it. (118)

The reward for Walter's action is immediate—he finally has his joy of life back. He declares that he is going to fight for the beauty of life; that is going to be his purpose. He loves beauty and poetry, but as long as he denied his gender role he was unable to enjoy either—now that he is doing his duty and fulfilling his masculine role, he is able to enjoy them again. His reward is the thing he wanted all along—just as Rilla's reward for fulfilling her gender role is the love of Kenneth Ford, which she had been longing for since the beginning of the novel. In fact, Rilla receives her own reward not too long after this exchange with Walter. Rilla's and Walter's paths are running peculiarly parallel. Right around the time that Rilla is carrying out her final lesson of domesticity—learning to cook—Walter is getting a medal for bravery by crossing into No-man's land to rescue a fallen soldier.

Walter's story ends with a triumphant victory of his traditional gender role. The night before he dies in battle, he writes a letter to Rilla in which he reveals that he knows his fate. This realization of his imminent death, however, is not something to fill him with the dread and fear he used to experience. Instead he is filled with peace and happiness. As Jem explains to Rilla months later, "Walter was *never* frightened after he got to the front. *Realities* never scared him—only his imagination could do that. His colonel told me that

Walter was the bravest man in the regiment" (275). Just as Rilla was able to become a housewifely creature out of necessity, Walter was able to be a brave soldier when the need arose. Montgomery is celebratory of their overcoming their own natures in order to fulfill the expectations of their gender. We are proud when Walter manages to be a brave hero, and we are equally glad when Rilla makes herself into a domestic, mothering woman.

iv

There is one aspect of a woman's domesticity that has not yet been discussed in this essay. In World War I, many women had to leave their domestic arenas to take over the jobs of the men who had enlisted. This aspect of the female experience is not neglected in this novel, and even Rilla does her part to make up for the lack of a workforce; she takes Jack Flagg's place at his father's store for a month. While this might be seen to undermine the conquest of the traditional feminine role in the novel, it is actually diminished significantly by a number of factors.

As in the rest of the novel, Rilla's experience is the closest to home-life of any of the women. When they all must stray from home, Rilla follows suit, only not as far. Yes, Rilla takes a job at a store, but this is particularly mild compared to the other jobs that women take. Susan takes a job doing hard labor in the fields, saying proudly:

> I am as good as any of them yet… Not a man of them can beat me when it comes to building a stack. When I offered to help Albert look doubtful. "I am afraid the work will be too hard for you," he said. "Try me for a day and see," said I. "I will do my darnedest." (216)

Susan again makes it clear that she can be fairly masculine. She can do the same work as a man, and she can do it just as well.

Mary Vance, the Blythe family's childhood friend, also takes a job of hard labor in the fields building grain stacks. She claims, "It's up to us girls to see that the harvest is got in, since the boys are so scarce. I've got overalls and I can tell you they're real becoming" (216). These actions and statements seem quite progressive for a novel that is so traditional in its views of femininity, but as they are coming from ancillary characters, the statement is not as bold.

Rilla's job is certainly not in the field. She takes Jack Flagg's job, in fact, so that *he* can go out into the field, explaining, "I don't think I'd be much use in a harvest field myself—though lots of the girls are—but I can set Jack free while I do his work" (216). She is a domestic, romantic heroine, and therefore she wouldn't be much use in the field. It is seen as acceptable, however, for her to take a job in a store.

In any case, Rilla's job in the store isn't out-of-bounds for a traditional girl. In *Anne of Green Gables*, a novel taking place decades before *Rilla of Ingleside*, and in a notoriously pokey, traditional town, there are many girls who work in shops, with absolutely no notoriety. When girl-shy Matthew wants to buy a dress for Anne, he reflects that "the Cuthberts always had gone to William Blair's… William Blair's two daughters frequently waited on customers there and Matthew held them in absolute dread" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 162). So Matthew decides to go to Lawson's instead, but "Alas! Matthew did not know that Samuel, in the recent expansion of his business, had set up a lady clerk also; she was a niece of his wife's and a very dashing young person indeed" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 162). Certainly a

clerk position is safe enough for Rilla to take on while maintaining her feminine domestic image.

And while Susan and Mary Vance accompany their new employment with proud declarations about their abilities and their enjoyment in the new opportunity, Rilla is less than radiant. Her father asks her if she thinks she will like "weighing out sugar and beans, and trafficking in butter and eggs," to which Rilla replies, "Probably not. That isn't the question. It's just one way of doing my bit" (216). She isn't marching valiantly out the kitchen door to a world beyond domestic bliss—she is simply doing her part, quietly and bravely.

And how does Montgomery end her novel? Does Rilla, after mastering the world of domesticity and finding her identity as a hard-working woman, finally turn her thoughts to higher avenues—teaching, college, a literary career, women's suffrage, or a life that is not measured by a man's love? No, Rilla ends the novel longing for a life as a wife and mother. Nearing the end of the war, Rilla describes how her sisters are busy at school:

> They will graduate in Arts this spring. I am evidently to be the dunce of the family. But somehow I never had any hankering for a college course, and even now it doesn't appeal to me. I'm afraid I'm rather devoid of ambition. There is only one thing I really want to be—and I don't know if I'll be it or not. If not—I don't want to be anything. But I shan't write it down. It is all right to think it; but, as Cousin Sophia would say, it might be brazen to write it down… I *will* write it down. I won't be cowed by the

> conventions and Cousin Sophia! I want to be Kenneth Ford's wife! There now!" (231)

After everything that Rilla has been through, the growth that she has undergone as a person, in the end her sole ambition is to be Kenneth Ford's wife. That is the extent of the fulfillment she requires. She has learned how to be a domestic creature—she now knows how to cook, clean, knit, sew, and raise a baby. So now all that remains is to find a position in a household as a wife and mother. After all, as according to Welter's essay, while it was acceptable for a female to fulfill her role as daughter and sister, the most important and ideal for a woman was as a wife. Welter explains, "Marriage was the proper state for the exercise of the domestic virtues" (169). What better place for Rilla to display her new abilities as a housekeeper and a mother than in her own home, as a wife.

There is a moment when it seems as though Rilla is ready to venture beyond domestic fulfillment, but it doesn't last long. She considers going to college very briefly, when Ken has been back from war for two weeks without getting in touch with her. She believes that maybe they are not going to be married after all, so she considers for a moment joining Una Merideth at college: "I suppose I'd better go with Una and take up Household Science, too… There did not seem anything very attractive just then about Household Science, but, with a whole new world waiting to be built, a girl must do something" (276). Rilla comes to the very brink of expanding her world and pursuing the same path as her mother and sisters (though rather than pursuing a degree in English, she would be pursuing a degree in Household Science, which is still fairly close to the domestic sphere she has become accustomed to). However, only a few paragraphs pass before Ken is at her doorstep, and her hopes of being a wife are satisfied. Rilla's path is

clear—she is going to marry, have babies, and be the woman of the household. And so ends the novel, and so the traditional gender role for a woman is not only confirmed—it is celebrated. Montgomery revealed in an interview that she believed a woman's place was in the home, and here is the affirmation of that belief.

This is not to say that Montgomery, or society, believed that this specific image of womanhood was the only way to be a woman. After all, Anne Shirley spends seven novels showing an alternative femininity—one that is more ambitious, less meek and mild, and radically different from the norms of the time. Indeed, *Rilla of Ingleside* contains many variations on the feminine experience. In Rilla, her sisters, Anne, and Susan, we see that there isn't just one strict set of guidelines for feminine behavior.

Perhaps Montgomery's ultimate message is that a woman must do what makes her happy. Anne was fulfilled by stepping outside of her gender role, by trying things that were not strictly feminine, by being ambitious and educated and making a name for herself. Rilla is fulfilled by becoming domesticated, by learning how to be a wife and a mother, and nothing more. Maybe Montgomery is simply saying that *both* are acceptable. Perhaps Anne's unconventional youth inspired young girls who felt that there was more to life than cooking and raising babies, but alienated the young girls who wanted a more traditional role. Montgomery's final novel in the *Anne* series may represent the triumph of traditional gender roles, but in conjunction with the earlier books, the resolution reconciles these two versions of womanhood. Montgomery steps outside of tradition with Anne, and steps back into it with Rilla, perhaps proving nothing except that a girl should have a choice in the type of life she leads.

Chapter Two: Familiar Chores in Unfamiliar Worlds;
Staging Domesticity in the Fantasy Novels of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien

What this thesis might suggest thus far—and what the average reader might assume—is that domestic scenes occur in domestic novels. It's all very well and good for there to be home-life and chores staged in realistic fiction that takes place mostly in the home; that is to be expected. It may not be strikingly remarkable for novels like L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* or Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* to contain quite a bit of explanation as to what goes on in the home; after all, these novels are intended to be representations of real life. The worlds of these novels are meant to replicate real places and people and, therefore, it is only natural for this realistic writing to include some aspects of everyday life.

However, the staging of domesticity is not restricted to these realistic novels. In the realm of juvenile fantasy novels, characters do more than their fair share of chores. And while the chores in realistic fiction might be intended for one main purpose, to represent real life, it isn't likely that fantasy novels have any such intentions. The chores in these novels take on so many more meanings and purposes, perhaps *because* of their presence in an otherwise unrealistic or unfamiliar world. In this chapter I will examine the staging of domesticity as it is used in two fantasy novels, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis and *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Rather than create a catalogue of every chore performed in these novels, it would be wise to look at a particular scene in each that showcases the domestic sphere, and to examine what implications and conclusions we can draw from these key scenes.

A Day with the Beavers in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

The Cult of Domesticity, as illuminated in the previous chapter, cast a long shadow over the twentieth century. It was not a set of values entirely contained within its height of popularity in the mid-nineteenth century; rather it influenced the way that society would think about family and gender roles for generations. As Signe Wegener explains in his book, *James Fenimore Cooper Versus the Cult of Domesticity: Progressive Themes of Femininity and Family in the Novels*, the Cult of Domesticity

> …was instrumental in shaping the idea of "family" in the modern sense of the term and whose impact could be felt in fiction and non-fiction alike. The conventions of this cult solidified the image of the modern (i.e. "nuclear") family, positing its version of this institution as the only stable element in a rapidly changing—and exceedingly competitive—industrial and commercial world. (36)

According to Wegener, the Cult of Domesticity was:

> A myth that presented—but also constructed—a highly idealized view of the family, a persuasive myth of origin. The myth still exists as seen in our nostalgic longing for an unattainable ideal, a golden past: a stable and nurturing family founded on solid old-fashioned "family values." (36)

Thus, in the changing times of the early twentieth century, and particularly after the radical changes brought on by two world wars, western society looked to the golden past of family values as a bulwark to which to cling. We can see this as played out in Lewis's post-war children's novel.

Possibly the most important domestic scene that we find in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* comes almost immediately after the Pevensie children have found their way into Narnia. Stopping by the Mr. Tumnus's house, the Pevensies find he has been brutally captured and imprisoned by the Queen's secret police. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy debate what their next move should be. While they are mostly agreed that they should do something to help Mr. Tumnus, they are in the middle of an unknown world, hungry, with no food and little prospect of finding food. It is at this moment that they come across Mr. Beaver, one of the talking animal denizens of Narnia, who invites them back to his home for dinner.

The reception that the Pevensies get at Mr. Beaver's home is entirely one of domestic bliss. After trudging through the ubiquitous Narnian snow for over an hour, they finally reach Mr. Beaver's riverside house, complete with the tell-tale chimney-smoke of the burning home-fires. We are immediately greeted by warm domesticity, as:

> The first thing Lucy noticed as she went in was a burring sound, and the first thing she saw was a kind-looking old she-beaver sitting in the corner with a thread in her mouth working busily at her sewing machine, and it was from it that the sound came. She stopped her work and got up as soon as the children came in. (71-72)

This image of the matron of the house busily working at her sewing machine is perhaps not entirely familiar or common for children today, but it certainly would have been in 1950, at which time this novel came out. The familiarity of this image brings us to the first purpose and effect of staged domesticity in a fantasy novel: to make an unfamiliar world more familiar. Narnia is a land with talking animals, mythical creatures,

witches, spells, and a god-like talking lion. It is important, particularly at the outset of such an adventure, to ease a young audience into the fantasy. A domestic scene such as this one, with a familiar and warm image of homecoming, will ground a reader and make the more fantastical elements of the narrative more digestible. The familiarity of this scene also helps a reader to put him or herself into the narrative. If the story completely abandoned reality, it might distance itself too much from the reader, making the reader feel alienated, or even worse, disinterested. The housework in this scene quickly and efficiently makes Narnia a more familiar, more likeable, and more relatable place.

Mrs. Beaver immediately jumps to action, dropping her sewing and commencing with the preparation of dinner. She puts Mr. Beaver to work as well, saying, "The potatoes are on boiling and the kettle's singing and I daresay, Mr. Beaver, you'll get us some fish" (72). Mr. and Mrs. Beaver's relationship throughout this novel is the everyday, familiar relationship of husband and wife. Mrs. Beaver works in the house, sewing and cooking, and Mr. Beaver works outside on the dam. Mrs. Beaver is kind, but fussy and a little bossy with Mr. Beaver, and Mr. Beaver indulges her bossiness with affection and obeisance. Their relationship, in fact, first exhibited here in this domestic scene, brings us to the next function of domesticity in this novel: to set up Mr. and Mrs. Beaver as surrogate parents for the Pevensie children.

Throughout the entirety of the novel, the Beavers are kind to the children, protective of them, and become their primary caretakers and guides throughout Narnia. The Pevensie children's real parents make no appearance in the novel—they are briefly referred to in passing, but never become a substantial presence. The children, at the outset of the novel, are staying with an old Professor in his country home because of the air-

raids in London. Their mother remains in London, and their father is ostensibly away at the war. The Professor has the potential to be a kind father-figure, except that he is unsocial and absent. His housekeeper, Mrs. Macready, could potentially be their mother figure, except that she is mean and hates children. So it is the Beavers who fill the parental void in the Pevensie children's lives. And it is their happy married relationship, first seen here in the preparation of dinner, which makes them perfect for the job.

So Mrs. Beaver starts up dinner, sending Mr. Beaver out to get fish. He complies good-naturedly, and

> … went out of the house (Peter went with him), and across the ice of the deep pool to where he had a little hole in the ice which he kept open every day with his hatchet. They took a pail with them. Mr. Beaver sat down quietly at the edge of the hole (he didn't seem to mind it being so chilly), looked hard into it, then suddenly shot in his paw, and before you could say Jack Robinson had whisked out a beautiful trout. Then he did it all over again until they had a fine catch of fish. (72-73)

With the preparation of dinner, we see yet another function of staged domesticity: to reinforce traditional gender roles. We've already seen that Mrs. Beaver works inside the house, sewing and cooking, and Mr. Beaver works outside. Here we see the Pevensie children wordlessly and without argument slip into their expected gender roles. Peter, the presumed male head of the Pevensie family while his father is away at war, follows Mr. Beaver's suit by going outside to help collect fish. This action is a mere parenthetical afterthought—the assignment of household roles and responsibilities isn't discussed; it is assumed and natural. But while this is presented as an afterthought, it is important to note

that it *is mentioned*, which means that we are supposed to take something from it—that is, the reaffirmation of traditional gender roles.

As Peter is outside fulfilling his gender role as the man of the family, the girls are inside with Mrs. Beaver, fulfilling their own gender role:

> Meanwhile the girls were helping Mrs. Beaver to fill the kettle and lay the table and cut the bread and put the plates in the oven to heat and draw a huge jug of beer for Mr. Beaver from a barrel which stood in one corner of the house, and to put on the frying-pan and get the dripping hot. (73)

The girls are fitting into their roles as the women of the household, helping Mrs. Beaver to make tea, prepare the table, and getting Mr. Beaver's beer set out for him. While Peter and Mr. Beaver come back into the house after cleaning the fish outside,

> Susan drained the potatoes and then put them all back in the empty pot to dry on the side of the range while Lucy was helping Mrs. Beaver to dish up the trout, so that in a very few minutes everyone was drawing up their stools… and preparing to enjoy themselves. (74)

This domestic dance goes off without a hitch. Everyone seems to know their responsibility, and there is no dialogue discussing who should be doing what. The men and the women stay out of each other's ways, gliding effortlessly about the house in a perfectly choreographed preparation of dinner.

Also in this peaceful domestic moment we see that the Pevensies are good-natured, hard-working children. Perhaps this is the most obvious purpose for staged domesticity in children's novels. Children often hate to do their chores, and buck against any work that their parents or elders put them to. But perhaps when they see their favorite

fictional characters going about their housework with no argument or complaint, they see the good example and want to follow it—at least ideally, if not in execution. Peter goes to help Mr. Beaver with the fish voluntarily, without being told or asked to. Susan and Lucy help Mrs. Beaver in the kitchen happily and without complaint. Even if these actions aren't meant to be heavy-handed lessons to be learned by the reader, they at least make Peter, Susan and Lucy more likeable and admirable as characters.

Therefore, whether the reader consciously realizes it or not, the absence of Edmund from these domestic proceedings makes him less likeable. From the moment the Pevensies step into the Beavers' home until the after-dinner discussion of Aslan and the White Witch, Edmund isn't mentioned once. While Peter, Susan and Lucy are all engaging in their good-natured housework, Edmund is conspicuously missing from the action. He is there the whole time, but what he is doing at any particular moment is a mystery. It can be deduced that he certainly isn't buttering bread or steeping tea—otherwise it would be mentioned along with the rest. Rather, Edmund is presumably lurking in the background, letting the others do the work, and probably nurturing a scowl on his face. Through the first half of the novel, Edmund is presented in a more sour, negative light than the other Pevensies. He isn't outright vilified—after all, he is their brother, and he has to be mostly redeemable—but he is made out to be somewhat of a spoiled prig. Edmund, by neglecting to join in the domestic scene, is made an outsider, if not outright unhelpful.

There is one final function of staging domesticity that this scene demonstrates, but to understand it we must look a couple chapters earlier in the novel, where Edmund first discovers Narnia. Edmund unwittingly follows Lucy through the wardrobe, but when he

gets to the other side and finds himself in Narnia, Lucy is nowhere to be seen. He is soon come upon by the Queen of Narnia, who we later learn is the White Witch, on her reindeer drawn sleigh. Upon learning that he is human (and therefore a danger to her long-lasting tyranny over Narnia), the Queen lures Edmund into a trap with sweets and the promise of prince-hood. She produces the sweets by using magic:

> The Queen took from somewhere among her wrappings a very small bottle which looked as if it were made of copper. Then, holding out her arm, she let one drop fall from it onto the snow beside the sledge. Edmund saw the drop for a second in mid-air, shining like a diamond. But the moment it touched the snow there was a hissing sound and there stood a jeweled cup full of something that steamed. The dwarf immediately took this and handed it to Edmund with a bow and a smile; not a very nice smile. Edmund felt much better as he began to sip the hot drink. It was something he had never tasted before, very sweet and foamy and creamy, and it warmed him right down to his toes. (35-36)

After Edmund drinks this steaming cup of foamy creaminess, he requests Turkish Delight and the Queen produces a box of the treat, using her magic bottle yet again. Edmund eats it all, and feels "quite warm now, and very comfortable" (37). It is after this that the Queen plants the plan in Edmund's mind to lure his siblings into Narnia and force them to be his servants when he is a prince.

What is of interest here are the two different processes for the preparation of food. The Pevensie children, along with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, make their meal from scratch—even catching fresh fish out of the river. They make the meal communally, and there is a

general peace and tranquility in the act. There are no hidden intentions in the meal they produce—the children are hungry, and the Beavers are happy to feed them. The meal, and the making of it, creates a bond between the Pevensies and the Beavers, a bond that is based on the good intentions that they all had as they worked together toward a common goal.

On the other hand, the Queen produces this meal for Edmund—if one can even call it a meal, containing nothing substantial and made up of sweets—with the worst intentions in mind. She uses this food as a way to trap Edmund, and as a way to convince him to betray his family. She uses this meal in a plan that will ideally lead to the death of the Pevensie family. While the Beaver's meal had been shared and had created a familial community, Edmund's meal is eaten by only Edmund. And, most importantly, the Queen produces this meal out of thin air, using magic.

With the industrialization and modernization of the western world, food preparation had changed drastically by the 1940s and 1950s. Home refrigerators were in common use, microwave ovens were on the cusp of commercial availability, Tupperware was about to explode in prevalence, and fast food chains were widely popular. Beyond the advancements in food preparation, booms in technology were making everything and everyone go *faster*. Here we see the Queen produce wonderful treats out of thin air, with sickening speed, and it can be deduced that this is a representation of the hastiness of the modern world. The Beavers' meal, on the other hand, produced from scratch, and with patience and peace-of-mind, is a throwback to a more traditional, slower paced society.

This comparison isn't complete without examining the effects each meal has on its diners. Edmund, though he feels warm and contented as he consumes his Turkish

delight, soon finds that "The more he ate the more he wanted to eat" (37). The meal doesn't do anything to curb his hunger—it isn't satisfying, even as he polishes off the entire box. He hopes that the Queen will offer him more, but she doesn't. The narrator explains:

> Probably the Queen knew quite well what he was thinking; for she knew, though Edmund did not, that this was enchanted Turkish Delight and that anyone who had once tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves. (38)

This dessert not only sparks gluttony and dissatisfaction, it tempts anyone who tastes it to eat so much that they will kill themselves. Of course, Edmund isn't allowed to let his hunger for the Turkish Delight go so far. However, he still suffers some nasty side-effects of that which he consumes. Already feeling uncomfortable from having eaten too many sweets, when Edmund meets up with Lucy he is so sick that she can see it on his face:

> "I say," said Lucy, "you do look awful, Edmund. Don't you feel well?"
>
> "I'm all right," said Edmund, but this was not true. He was feeling very sick. (43)

This sickness is partially the sickness of spirit, as Edmund has just learned that the Queen is also the hated and feared tyrant, the White Witch. But Edmund's sickness is manifested physically, brought on by the speedily produced and unsatisfying Turkish Delight.

The meal the Beavers and the Pevensies make, on the other hand, is entirely satisfying. The children take delight both in the food that they're eating and the work that

they put into it. They enjoy the freshness of the fish, as well as the substantiality of eating something that has just been plucked from nature:

> …all the children thought—and I agree with them—that there's nothing to beat good freshwater fish if you eat it when it has been alive half an hour ago and has come out of the pan half a minute ago. And when they had finished the fish Mrs. Beaver brought unexpectedly out of the oven a great and gloriously sticky marmalade roll, steaming hot, and at the same time moved the kettle onto the fire, so that when they had finished the marmalade roll the tea was made and ready to be poured out. And when each person had got his (or her) cup of tea, each person shoved back his (or her) stool so as to be able to lean against the wall and gave a long sigh of contentment. (74-75)

Edmund, however, is unable to enjoy this contentment. He eats the food, but doesn't even appreciate it because he can't stop thinking about the Turkish Delight. The nauseatingly fast food that the Queen produced for him has ruined homemade food. The book explains, saying, "there's nothing that spoils the taste of good ordinary food half so much as the memory of bad magic food" (88). Whether or not this is a direct assault on Lewis's part of fast food, microwaves, or Tupperware, can only be guessed. Perhaps it is more likely that Lewis was making a statement about the value of family sharing, and the importance of working for what you get. But the contrast between the two scenes certainly seems to glorify the ways of the past.

An Unexpected Party in *The Hobbit*

The most domestic scene in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* comes almost directly at the outset of the novel. Gandalf the Grey comes to visit Bilbo Baggins at his home in the neighborhood of The Hill, and asks him to come on an adventure. Bilbo refuses indignantly—he doesn't care for adventures—but invites him to tea the next day. Bilbo is so flustered by the encounter that he forgets all about Gandalf and the promised tea—that is until he hears a ring at the front door the next day. He opens the door to find not Gandalf the Grey, but rather Dwalin the Dwarf, who is soon followed by eleven other dwarves and eventually Gandalf, all of whom make their way into his home without explanation. Bilbo, flummoxed and flustered, treats this company to tea and snacks, and later to dinner. He empties out his cupboard in order to accommodate all of them, and is rather put out about the whole thing. This domestic scene has fewer possible purposes and functions than the dinner performed in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, but it is no less crucial to novel's storytelling, and no less beneficial to our understanding of how chores can function in a children's fantasy novel.

There are two major storytelling functions at work here in this unexpected party in Bilbo Baggins's home. The first is to quickly demonstrate Bilbo Baggins's character—that is, to show him as an effeminate, fussy creature. Bilbo's personality, as Tolkien demonstrates it, is synonymous with his domesticity. In fact, his home is described and explored even before Bilbo is introduced in the novel—rather, before *anything* else is said—proving it to be one of the most important aids in getting to know this character. The novel begins thus:

> In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it so sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort. (3)

The opening sentence clearly begs further explanation—however, the explanation that one might expect would center around the definition of "hobbit," particularly if "hobbit" is an unfamiliar term. What the reader gets instead is an explanation about what type of hole this is. It is not a dirty or uncomfortable hole—as the narrator feels compelled to explain—this is a comfortable hole. But its comfort is understandable given that this is a hobbit-hole—its comfort is, in fact, conditional on this fact. This opening paragraph already sets up much of what we come to learn about hobbits, and particularly about Bilbo. Hobbits live in holes, and hobbits live in comfort. However, the narration seems to find little interest in the hobbits themselves. It would rather discuss the home itself. The novel continues:

> It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with paneled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats—the hobbit was fond of visitors. (3)

The exploration and explication of this home is continued on at length. We learn more about the hobbit in question—he is fond of having visitors, he has many pantries (denoting his love of food) and whole rooms devoted to his clothing (denoting his love of

fashion and comfort), and he favors his view of the gardens and meadows from his windows. But we learn all of this through the medium of a description of his home. This home is the most important part of Bilbo's life, and it is the first thing that we need to know about him.

When Dwalin shows up at Bilbo's doorstep, unexpected and unannounced, Bilbo can only think of one thing to do. He very politely asks, "I am just about to take tea; pray come and have some with me" (8). Dwalin comes in and they begin to drink tea and eat cakes, when another ring sounds from the doorway. As another dwarf comes into Bilbo's home for tea, the narrator reflects,

> [Bilbo] liked visitors, but he liked to know them before they arrived, and he preferred to ask them himself. He had a horrible thought that the cakes might run short, and then he—as the host: he knew his duty and stuck to it however painful—he might have to go without. (9)

This scene does a lot to establish Bilbo's character. He isn't spontaneous—he likes to be able to anticipate the arrival of his guests, as much as he does like to have company. He is a strict adherent to decorum—he finds it rude that these guests are appearing though he had never invited them. He knows and lives by the rules of civilized behavior—as the host, he will be the first to go without cakes if they run out. And he enjoys his creature comforts—the thought of going without cake is a horrible one. Bilbo is shown here to be an entirely fussy, domesticated character.

And so for a while Bilbo acts the host—or rather the hostess. Bilbo's home has no matriarch. He has no wife, no sister, no daughter, and no mother. If he had, according to the customs of the early twentieth century, she would most likely be the one taking drink

orders and preparing cakes. As it is, however, Bilbo is the one who fills this role, and he does it rather well. As yet another dwarf enters his home, saying, "A little beer would suit me better, if it is all the same to you, my good sir… But I don't mind some cake—seed cake, if you have any," Bilbo answers automatically and graciously:

> "Lots!" Bilbo found himself answering, to his own surprise; and he found himself scuttling off, too, to the cellar to fill a pint beer-mug, and then to a pantry to fetch two beautiful round seed-cakes which he had baked that afternoon for his after-supper morsel. (9)

Bilbo is entirely effeminized during this scene. He is absolutely incapable of turning away these guests—though they are uninvited, unexpected, and unannounced. What follows is essentially the rape of Bilbo's home. These dwarves, gruff and bearded, force themselves into Bilbo's hobbit-hole without so much as a please or thank you (literally—these words aren't mentioned by any dwarf, though they are spoken often by Bilbo himself). They take what they want, be it cakes, tea, beer, ale, porter, scones, wine, pies, salad, or coffee, and Bilbo is powerless to turn them away. Though he is upset about their manners, their intrusion, and the situation in general, still he welcomes them all into his home with a polite attitude and a generous pantry.

The ideology of what it means to be a man was, in the early twentieth century, probably not too different from what we idealize it to be today. In Michele Adams and Scott Coltrane's essay, "Boys and Men in Families; the Domestic Production of Gender, Power, and Privilege," it is established that "Men, oriented to the public sphere, are understood to be active, strong, independent, powerful, dominant, and aggressive" (232-233). According to Michael Kaufman, in his book *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain*

and the Lives of Men, "Although there is no one set of characteristics that defines masculinity, there are some enduring and pervasive features. In the eyes of many men and women, masculinity means being in control, having mastery over yourself and the world around you. It means taking charge" (28). Bilbo is by no means in charge of this situation; he is not powerful, dominant, or aggressive. He is incapable of turning away these unwanted guests, and his only defense is through passive-aggressive comments that he makes only to himself about the rudeness of the dwarves.

Not only does he take the woman's place in the kitchen preparing all these cakes and drinks (which, in the year 1937, would regularly have been the woman's place) but he also takes their orders with submission and courtesy. The dwarves and Gandalf request all sorts of various treats and drinks, along with second and third helpings of the ones that have already crossed the table, and Bilbo accommodates all of the requests without a hitch. He never once tells one of his guests that he doesn't have a certain dish or drink, because he is a prepared host, as most young women in early twentieth century Britain were taught to be.

Bilbo is effeminized even further—or is at the very least made to look fussy indeed—between tea and supper, when there is washing up to do. Thorin, the leader of the party of dwarves, accepts Bilbo's invitation to dinner and instructs the rest to clean up. And:

> Thereupon the twelve dwarves… jumped to their feet, and made tall piles of all the things. Off they went, not waiting for trays, balancing columns of plates, each with a bottle on the top, with one hand, while the hobbit ran

after them almost squeaking with fright: “please be careful!” and “please, don’t trouble! I can manage.” But the dwarves only started to sing… (12)

The dwarves take over some of the domestic responsibilities that Bilbo had previously been handling. They do the dishes and clean up their own mess. This might appear to undermine the feminization that the rest of the scene does to Bilbo’s character, except that as the dwarves complete their domestic task, they mock Bilbo with their singing. The lyrics to their song are included in the narrative, some of which include:

Chip the glasses and crack the plates!

Blunt the knives and bend the forks!

That’s what Bilbo Baggins hates—

Smash the bottles and burn the corks!

… That’s what Bilbo Baggins hates!

So carefully! carefully with the plates! (12-13)

This song, while potentially a mere light-hearted ribbing of Bilbo, works to trivialize his priorities and his way of life. Bilbo’s home, along with the dishes, the silverware, the bottles and corks, and all the other small minutiae of his domestic sphere, is a source of comfort and pride for Bilbo. He appreciates nice things, and he wants his house to be a good reflection of his character and his capability as a housekeeper. The dwarves, in calling Bilbo out on his fussy concern for domestic things, ostracize him and make him seem effeminate. While they do not, in fact, chip the glasses and crack the plates, the dwarves are made to seem robust and manly because they wouldn’t mind doing so. Bilbo, on the other hand, is made to seem effeminate because he would care if his dishes were smashed. The fact that he is running after them in their vigorous dish-

washing, squeaking with fright, only intensifies this impression of Bilbo as a fussy, effeminate domesticated creature.

The second major storytelling function of this domestic scene is much more benevolent than the first: to contrast the comfort of home with the harshness of adventure. In many ways this is the more obvious of functions for a domestic scene in a fantasy novel. Many stories begin with and/or return to a domestic scene to set a foil against which the harshness of adventure can be compared. The narrative choice is a logical one—how better to show how remarkable and difficult a struggle the character goes through than to show them at a resting point, at home, and in a state of comfort and well-being. This scene performs this function remarkably.

Not only does this domestic scene set out an interesting contrast for the reader, it also sets out a difficult decision for Bilbo. While he quite clearly loves his home-life, he can't help but be tempted by the thoughts of adventure and glory. The night of the unexpected party contains many changes-of-heart on the part of Bilbo—first he can't stand even the thought of adventure, then he hears the dwarves sing of the misty mountains and dreams of travelling, then he is scared by mortality and retreats back to his domesticity, and then he is stirred out again by his own pride and his desire to prove these dwarves—who don't think he is fit for the job—wrong. He ends the night in a state of indecision, and wakes the next morning pleased but slightly disappointed to find that the party has ventured on without him. He reflects on the general state of his house:

> Nearly every pot and pan he possessed seemed to have been used. The washing-up was so dismally real that Bilbo was forced to believe the party of the night before had not been part of his bad dreams, as he had rather

> hoped. Indeed he was really relieved after all to think that they had all gone without him, and without bothering to wake him up ("But with never a thank-you" he thought); and yet in a way he could not help feeling just a trifle disappointed. The feeling surprised him. (27)

It seems that, to Bilbo, domesticity and adventure cannot exist together. The realness of his dishes forces him to think that all the adventure had been merely a dream. He lets himself fall back into his old domesticity once more, with one final moment of peace and home:

> So he put on an apron, lit fires, boiled water, and washed up. Then he had a nice little breakfast in the kitchen before turning out the dining-room. By that time the sun was shining; and the front door was open, letting in a warm spring breeze. Bilbo began to whistle loudly and to forget about the night before. In fact he was just sitting down to a nice little second breakfast in the dining-room by the open window, when in walked Gandalf. (27)

What follows is a flurry of action, as Bilbo is hustled out the door and onto the open road. Domestic scenes such as the tea and dinner at Bilbo's house rarely occur again throughout the rest of the novel. Bilbo starts out on an adventure on which he is often hungry and cold, and constantly in mortal peril. The contrast that this opening domestic scene sets up against the trials of adventure is a stark one. But why is it important to have such a dramatic contrast? Why, for more interesting storytelling, of course. Also, by establishing such a comfortable domestic sphere in which Bilbo exists, Tolkien shows how unprepared and unsuited he is for a life on the road. Bilbo, when annoyed by the

unexpected houseguests, reflects that he "was feeling positively flummoxed, and was beginning to wonder whether a most wretched adventure had not come right into his house" (11-12). He understands this impromptu party to be an adventure, not realizing that the real adventure is yet to come. What is more, it is a wretched adventure, and he doesn't care for it in the slightest. What is amusing here is that Bilbo doesn't know the wretchedness that is in store for him—a wretchedness that makes this tea-time adventure seem like a frivolous concern.

Bilbo's unsuitableness for adventure is stressed once more (though not for the last time) as he is hurriedly leaving his home. Gandalf rushes him out the door, and Bilbo has to hurry if he is going to meet the party of dwarves on the road in time. As he arrives, the narrator explains, "Very puffed he was, when he got to Bywater just on the stroke of eleven, and found he had come without a pocket-handkerchief!" (28). Bilbo's one concern at the commencement of his journey is that he doesn't have a pocket-handkerchief—the tone of the narration suggests that this is a horrible thing indeed.

When Bilbo comes across the dwarves, he is still preoccupied with his lack of comforts:

> "I'm awfully sorry," said Bilbo, "but I have come without my hat, and I have left my pocket-handkerchief behind, and I haven't got any money. I didn't get your note until after 10:45 to be precise."
>
> "Don't be precise," said Dwalin, "and don't worry! You will have to manage without pocket-handkerchiefs, and a good many things, before you get to the journey's end." (29)

Dwalin is quite right in this statement, and Bilbo meets with moments in his journey in which he has nothing but his wits to rely on, much less pocket-handkerchiefs and money.

Establishing Bilbo's unsuitableness for adventure through this domestic scene performs a very important function; it makes us both worry for his safety and rejoice when he is actually triumphant as an adventurer. His ability as an adventurer is called into question throughout the novel, with the dwarves—particularly Thorin—doubting whether he should really be a part of this quest. The domestic scene that we see Bilbo enjoying—and indeed, which defines Bilbo's very personality—helps the audience share these doubts with the dwarves. When Bilbo triumphs and proves himself to be quite capable in his adventures, we cheer at his metamorphoses from this fussy, domesticated creature into a real force to be reckoned with.

At the end of the novel, Bilbo returns home to his hobbit-hole, weary of his adventure. He has lost his reputation in The Hill, as hobbits are not supposed to embark on adventures, but he doesn't mind:

> He was quite content; and the sound of the kettle on his hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party. (271)

Bilbo has come back from his journey a transformed character. He still enjoys his domesticity, perhaps even more than before, but that domesticity has been transformed as well. His home, where before he had cherished his paneled walls, polished furniture and dishes, he now has adorned with his sword and coat of mail. His domesticity is tempered with more masculine interests. But it is remarkable that he hasn't entirely abandoned his

domestic pursuits—he has instead created a more balanced domestic bliss, and in so doing has held on to his identity as a hobbit, even through the grandest of adventures.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

When I began my research, I had expected to find one clear function of chores in juvenile literature. I expected to find that many of these novels included domestic images so frequently, and with such detail, as a means of *persuasion*. These chores, done by beloved and admired characters, would ostensibly convince the young readers to do their chores. I had in mind films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* for example, with its many songs and scenes devoted to Snow White teaching the dwarfs and the woodland creatures how to go about their domestic lives—their chores, their work, and washing their hands before dinner—in the right way. And, to be sure, this *is* one of the functions of this motif in juvenile literature. However, not only is this persuasive dutifulness kept company by many other functions—it is eclipsed by them almost entirely.

The operation of domesticity in juvenile literature is so much more complicated and subtle than a simple plea with children to do their housework. Rather than being so mundanely didactic, staged domesticity instead represents a deeper moral code and concern with which society is preoccupied.

Throughout my research, I've come to the conclusion that many of the functions of chores and domestic images in juvenile literature operate within the same purpose; that is, to reinforce traditions and to glorify the ways of the past. It is perhaps no coincidence; Children and young adults are, with each generation, moving faster and pushing harder against the norms than the generation before them. It seems only natural, however futile, for adults to offer these children literature which reflects and rejects this forward motion by appealing to the customs and expectations of the past.

The early twentieth century exhibits this embrace of tradition and nostalgia with fervor. With two world wars, social changes like women's suffrage and civil rights movements, changes within the structure and function of a family unit, and ever-evolving ideas about gender, the early twentieth century was a tumultuous time in which society was both pushing for and resisting against change. It is only natural that, for their children at least, people would want a solid foundation to cling to.

This consuming preoccupation, while absolutely prevalent in the early twentieth century, is still present today. It might not be manifested in such an obvious way, with such a clear divide in gender roles, but there is still that subtle resonance in contemporary children's and young adult literature which represents a continuation of the myth of good old family values. From the Harry Potter novels, in which Mrs. Weasley inducts Harry into her family by knitting him a big ugly sweater, to the Hunger Games series, where Katniss is forever struggling—hunting, cooking, bartering—to keep her family fed, domesticity is still a common motif with the same consistent goal—to glorify the ways of the past and to reinforce traditional family values.

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